

"We educate to liberate."



# FOCUS



NEWSLETTER OF THE AFRICAN HERITAGE EDUCATORS' NETWORK

V. 2, N.1

SPRING 1993

## BLACK FOCUSSED SCHOOLS

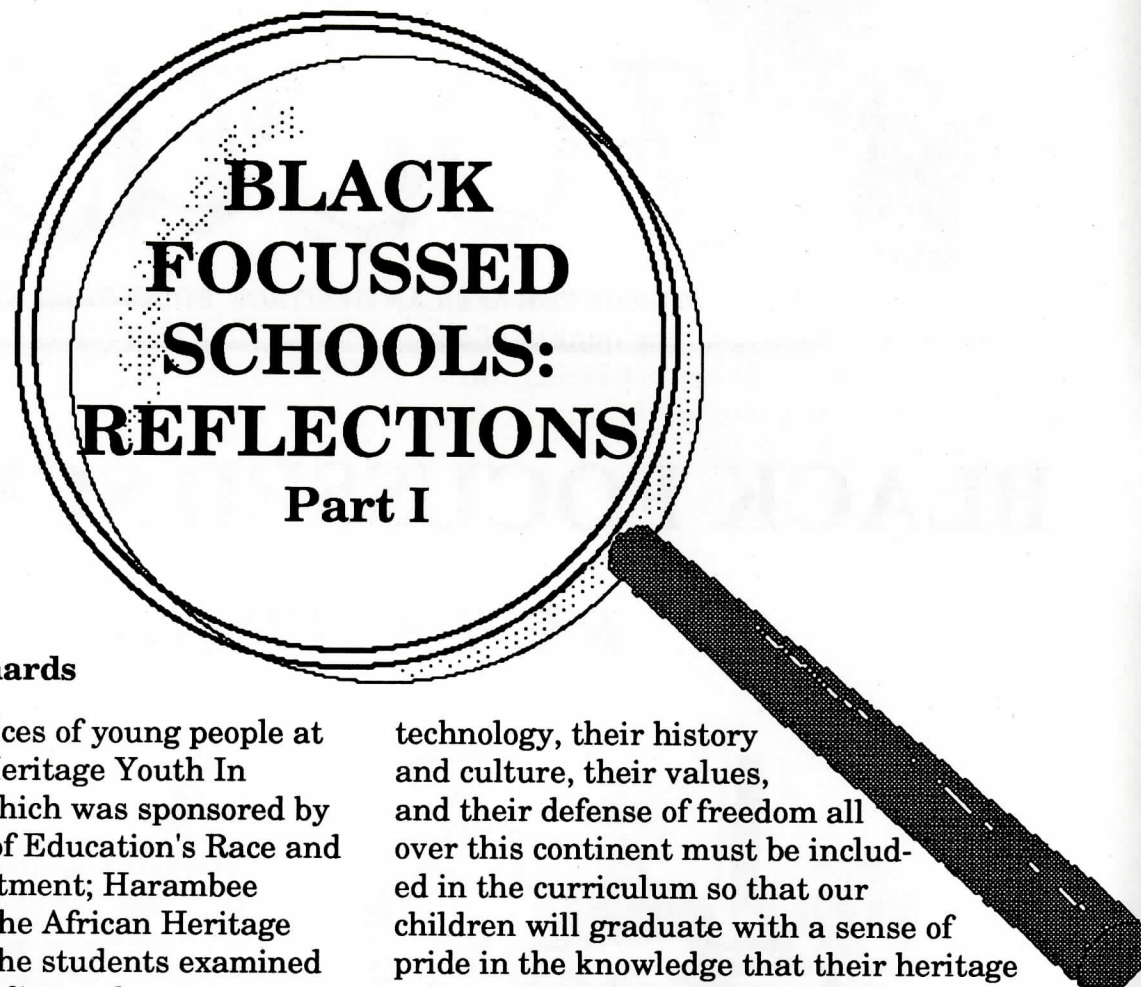
### REFLECTIONS



**ALSO  
IN  
THIS  
ISSUE**

**Blacks in Science**  
**Intrinsic Power and Social Action**  
**AHEN Profiles**  
**Progress Report – PROJECT '90**





By: **Vernon Farrell**  
and **Jacqui Richards**

**W**e hear the voices of young people at the African Heritage Youth In Conference which was sponsored by the North York Board of Education's Race and Ethnic Relations department; Harambee Centres, Canada; and the African Heritage Educators' Network. The students examined issues concerning prejudice and discrimination, respect shown towards them by the system, positive Black role models in the schools, self motivation, self reliance, and their future goals and plans. We believe that their responses make a strong case for Black focussed schools.

Concerning the curriculum, students said: "We feel like we don't exist." "They don't think about us." On the issues of schools and teachers, they said: "They skip us, they don't care." "Teachers ignore us when we raise our hands." "They don't take time to help us." About the Eurocentricity of the school system, they said, "Expectations which teachers have of students of African heritage is low."

The conference report concludes that: "Most students are experiencing the school system as very Eurocentric, where not only does the body language of teachers appear to make them (students) feel inferior, but they may actually be damaged by overt statements." The contributions of our ancestors to the world such as their innovations in science and

technology, their history and culture, their values, and their defense of freedom all over this continent must be included in the curriculum so that our children will graduate with a sense of pride in the knowledge that their heritage boasts of inventiveness, resilience, spirituality and courage.

The students recognized their share of the responsibility to keep their grades up, to continue their education, to try to get their parents more involved in the school system, to work with younger children to improve their attitudes and even to remember to help each other "when you get up there."

Some recommendations made at the conference included:

- That schools be much more challenging, and that all staff actively and persistently encourage their Black students to excel;
- That teachers must promote excellence in academics over sports;
- That schools must do more than promote the perception that Black students have equal opportunities; and
- That specific programs be developed which are more responsive to the needs of African students.

The complexities of public schooling within an exclusionary society and the perpetuation of

## **BLACK FOCUSED SCHOOLS, continued**

oppression through institutionalized and structural operations allow for a focus to be placed upon Black focussed schools as alternatives to the status quo of exclusion. Lee (1992) in "Profile of an Independent Black Institution: African-Centered Education at Work" puts it succinctly, "... the quality of our collective future depends on reclaiming the minds of our children who are far too often lost to the streets" (p. 175). As the term "alternative schooling" implies it is understood that Black focussed schools do not have to be every Black person's choice and parents should have the right to choose.

Black focussed schools are necessary if oppressed groups are to liberate themselves through the reclamation of their children. Black focussed schools are necessary for our children's survival as critical thinkers.

There are those who argue that the system must change and that Black focussed schools essentially relieve the educational system of its responsibility to effectively educate all students. This must not be the case. Notwithstanding the fact that the North York Board of Education has responded to the need for change by initiating projects such as African History Infusion and Literacy

Enrichment Academic Programs (LEAP) at the Intermediate Level, the proportion of the crisis among students of African heritage necessitates immediate resolution. The foregoing defines the issue according to two separate but complementary approaches: one, systemic (mainstream) and long-term and, two, alternative and immediate. Resolution of the crisis within the African heritage community must be seen within the context of immediate action.

The concept of Black focussed schools is not new. Schools for Black children were established by Black parents as early as the 1830's in Essex County (Windsor area). Mary Ann Shadd was one of the first educators to establish a Black school for students whose parents were refugees from slavery in America. Over the past 20 years, a number of Black independent schools (K-12) have been established across the United States. Of course, Black institutions of higher education such as Howard University, Spelman College and Tuskegee University have existed even longer.

Black focussed schools will enable students to reflect on shared history, social relationships, belief systems, social practices, and collective responses to political and economic realities; above all, students will

*continued on page 4*

## **New Appointments**

### **CONGRATULATIONS**

**Daphne Changoo**  
*Vice Principal,  
Westview Centennial Secondary School*

**Ivy Jennings**  
*Vice Principal, Brookview Middle School*

**Marlene Kelly**  
*Principal, Elia Middle School*



## BLACK FOCUSED SCHOOLS, continued

develop a sense of identity, critical consciousness and belonging (Lee, 1992).

*Towards a New Beginning*, a November 1992 report produced by the four-level government/African-Canadian working group proposed that

...the Middle or Junior High School with the highest percentage Black population in each of the cities comprising the Municipality of Metropolitan Toronto be chosen to participate in the Focused School model (p. 83).

Concentration on the components of employment equity, curriculum, community-based culturally specific services, voluntary action, special youth leadership and business partnership among others was recommended as essential to the reconstruction process and the implementation of the Black focussed school model.

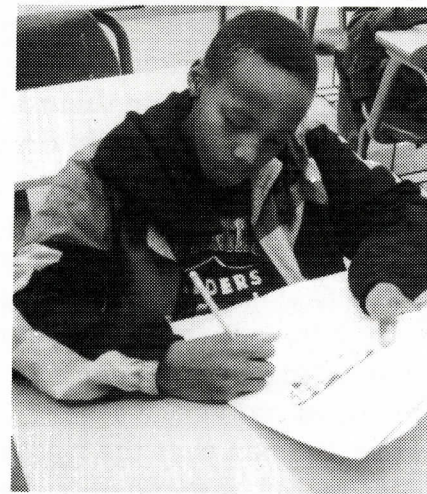
It is hoped that the issues presented in this article will stimulate further discussion with a view to developing other implementation approaches (immediate and long term), for inclusive curricula and consequent validation of the African heritage experience.

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"If there is no struggle, there is no progress. Those who profess to favour freedom and yet deprecate agitation are people who want crops with out plowing up the ground, they want rain without thunder and lightning. They want oceans without the mighty roars of its waters. This struggle may be a moral one, or it may be a physical one or it may be both moral and physical, but it must be a struggle. Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will... Men may not get all they pay for in this world, but they must certainly pay for all they get."

- Frederick Douglass

## "Stay Focussed."

By: Vicky Brooks-Johnson

It is 1993 and African people are engaged in a worldwide struggle - a global struggle for survival. It is no longer enough for us to be "aware" or to have an intellectual understanding of the problems of growth and social change. We must be committed to

in nature will be restored, oppression minimized and eliminated and people liberated only through continuous, consistent, committed actions on both a very small scale and a very large scale. It is the specifics of one's life - the day by day acts that will make a difference.

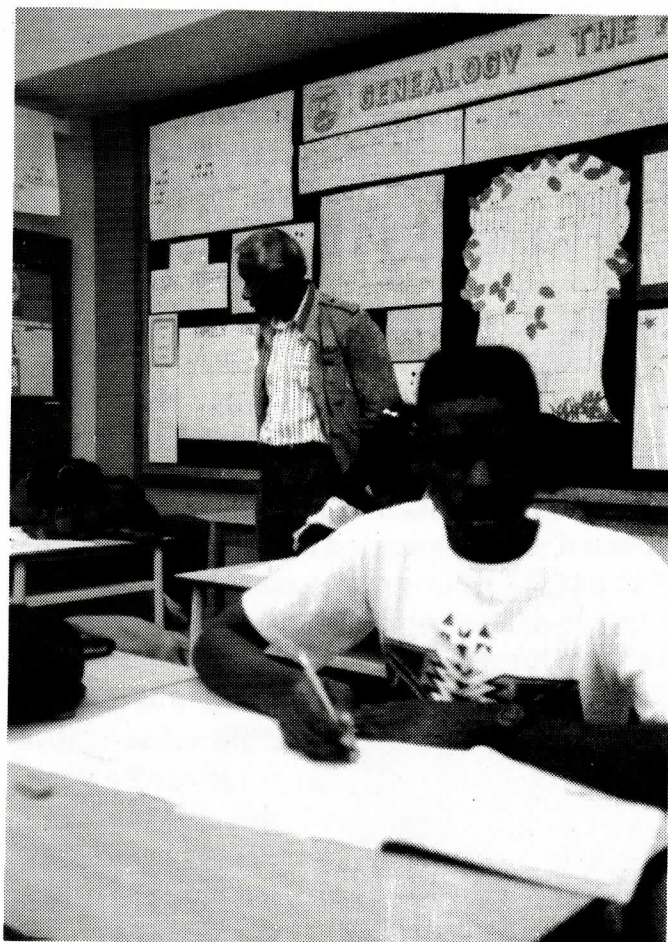
It can be very difficult to actively work for a change within the present cultural framework. There are so many rewards for remaining blind and oblivious to the circumstances of one's own comfort. The risks are many for people who choose to retain their values and



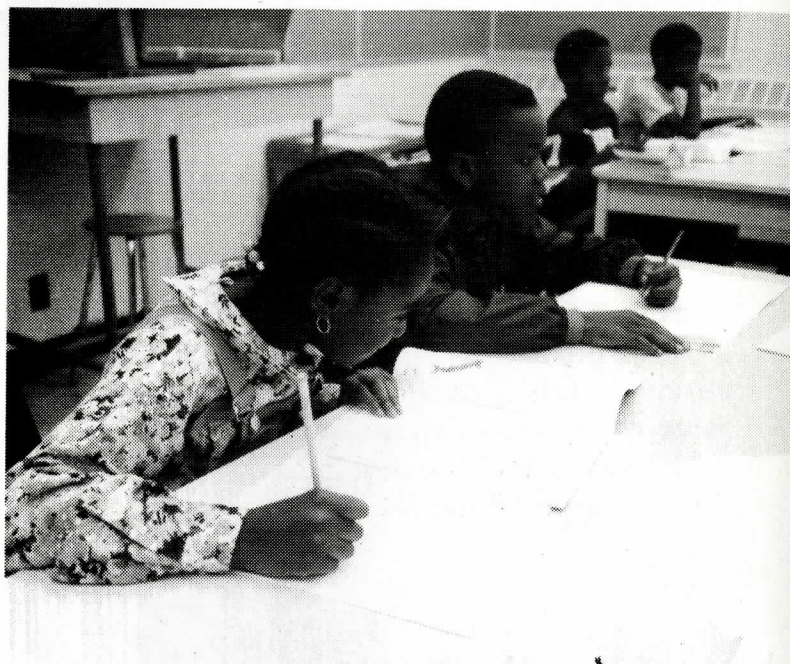
personal growth, social and cultural change and we must act upon what we know in many specific ways. We must act to change ourselves and not expect change to come through a "how to" book or through some sudden revelation. Harmonious relationships

culture. Yet we must remain focussed - through which we will look inward and reconstruct the images of ourselves and our communities. Remaining focussed is crucial to the survival of African people - it is the nurturing element





**"Stay Focussed,"  
continued**



No one of us can struggle alone with the amount of energy required to sustain something as valuable as the right to be recognized as a free human being. In order to survive and build a different, more humane world we must work collectively - nurture and support one another. We must believe in the validity, the righteousness and the significance of our struggle for change and a higher level of human life.

*"Let us dare struggle, free ourselves economically and culturally and raise images above the earth and reflect our capacity for human progress and greatness. This is the challenge and burden of our history which assumes and requires a solid faith."*  
- Maulana Karenga

We have endured and continue to live, survive and thrive by this spirit, by this faith and by our action... Stay focussed! ●

and as necessary as water and oxygen. It is when we become alienated, unfocussed, dislocated from our centre that things fall apart.

African people all over the world, through all time, have shown an indomitable spirit and capacity for hope – hope that goes beyond the meaning of the moment and has always allowed us to rise above our circumstances to celebrate life. It is revealed in our music, in our dance, in our art. These are vehicles which continue to express our culture, our spirituality and our love.

## Blacks in Science:

### Standing Still or Making Progress

By: Vicky Brooks-Johnson



**O**n Saturday March 27, 1993 Project '90 was the host site for a very successful Science Symposium for youth and adults of African heritage. The theme of the symposium was *Recovering Our History: The First Step*. The event was organized with the goal of increasing awareness of the historical and contemporary involvement and contributions of African Canadians in the fields of mathematics, science, and technology.

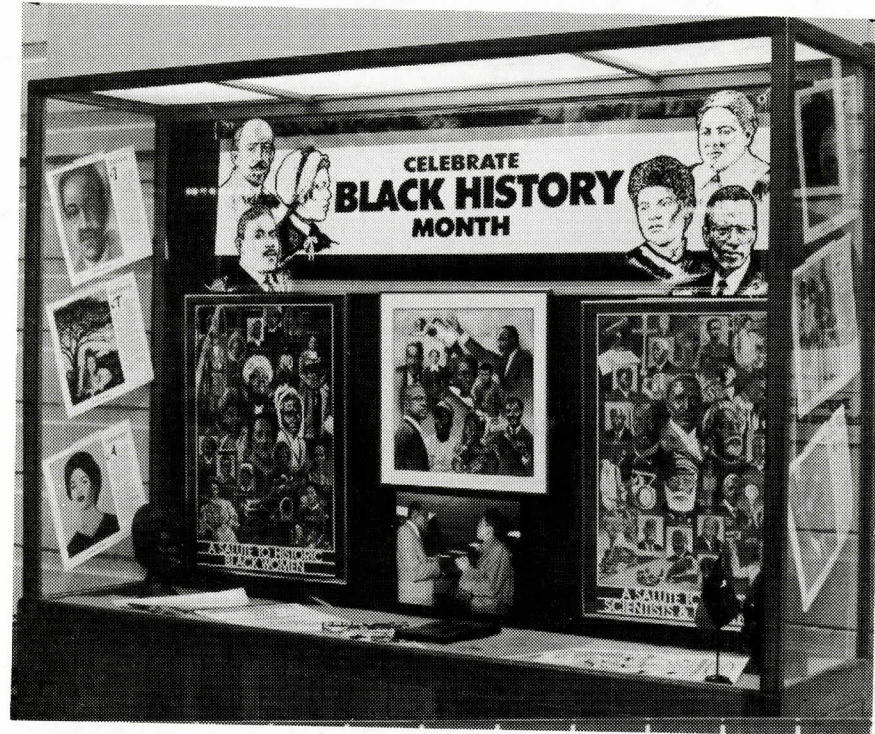
Youth and adults were inspired by the Keynote addresses given by Maria Cirino, Research Pharmacologist with the Merck-Frost Centre for Therapeutic Research and Joseph Dadson, President of Medionics International.

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# CONTEMPLATING.....



*Live the Dream*



*Focussed Students*



*Grade 3/4 C.A.T.*

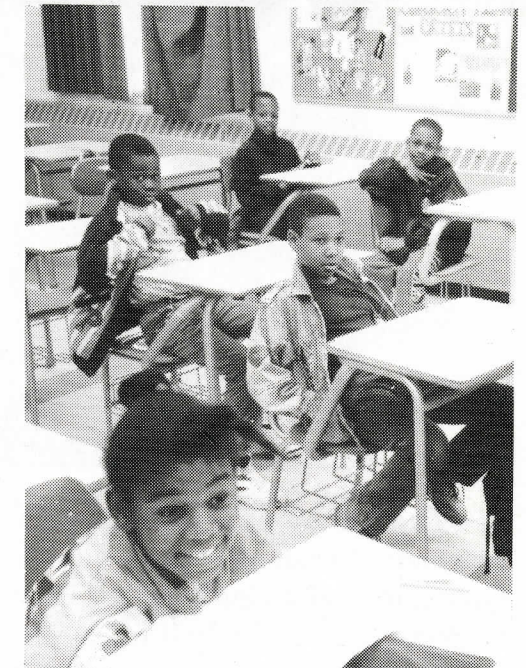


*I Wonder*

# .....THE FUTURE



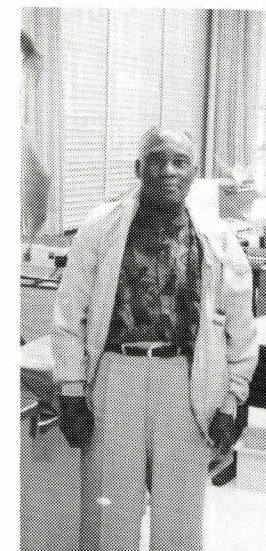
*Project '90 Parents*



*Grade 5/6, Project '90*



*Grade 9 at work*

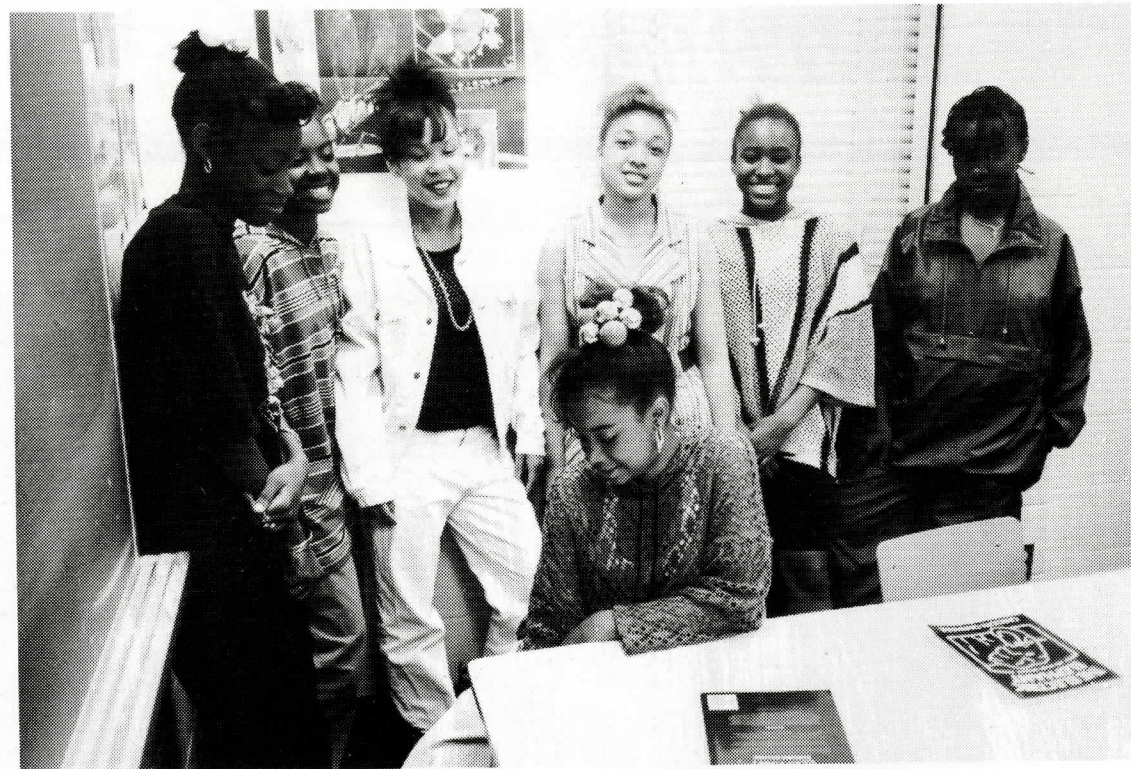


*Project '90 Coordinator*



*Time Out*





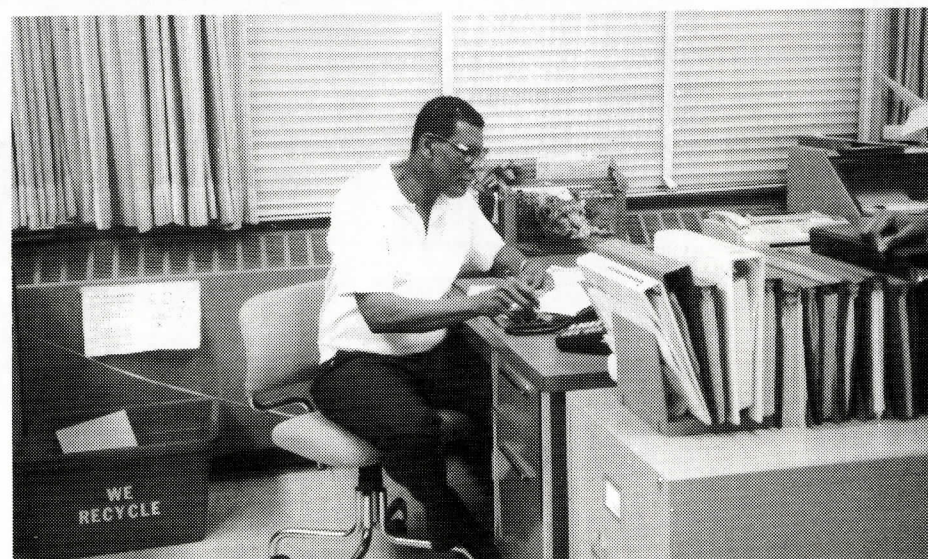
The workshops were informative and well-received. Sessions were conducted by Dr. Bill Quansah of the Engineering Dept. Seneca College; Lance Mitchell from Each One Teach One, a community organization; Dr. Daly, Geneticist with Seneca College; Al Fearon, Meta Pharmaceuticals and Akwatu Khente, researcher and historian of African History and Civilizations.

The symposium concluded with an artistic presentation by a youth group. The play was based on a story of a young female student of African heritage discovering a cure for AIDS.

The day's activities certainly bore witness to the harmony between the arts and science.

Recovering Our History: The First Step was co-sponsored by the African Canadian Heritage Association and the African Heritage Educators' Network and funded by the Anti-Racism Secretariat.

We look forward to future initiatives in this area as the organizers plan for a Fall conference designed to address issues related to the status and progress of African Canadian professionals and students in the fields of science and technology. ●



## Intrinsic Power and Social Action

By: Vernon Farrell



The concept of humanity makes us believe that all people regardless of race, class, gender, ethnicity and physical challenges are humans. There is no degree of 'humaness', which means people can never be more human or less human. It is true that sometimes people behave inhumanely, but that does not take away from the essence of being human. If the ultimate goal of humans is happiness then that behaviour which denies happiness is unacceptable. Notwithstanding the fact that the term 'unacceptable' is relative, it is used here to indicate any action (overt or covert) which interferes with or blocks attempts at self actualization. The idea of happiness is equated with self actualization in recognition of the many ways people describe happiness. The terms 'self actualization' and 'happiness' are used interchangeably.

When a society of people behaves unacceptably, those who are denied access to the ultimate life goal of happiness must of necessity act to alter unacceptable behaviour, which excludes them from opportunities to realizing their ultimate life goal. It is this decision to act which is called social action.

Behaviour which excludes humans from opportunities to attain their ultimate life goal of happiness is manifested by people who hold power. Power is often wielded by people of one race or class or colour or gender over others

who appear different from the powerbrokers. But it was stated earlier that humans cannot be more or less human than each other. All humans are the same. Therefore acts of exclusion by powerbrokers is unacceptable behaviour.

An interesting observation of power brokers' behaviour reveals dominance as that behaviour which attempts to perpetuate exclusion and denial of access. Those who are excluded are dominated and the dominated must never accept being dominated, for the dominated are human and the dominant are behaving inhumanely, which is unacceptable behaviour.

When talking about power it is useful to underscore the fact that power is not a commodity, meaning it is not something which some people have and others do not. For example, some people have cars others do not. Some people have suits others do not. Some people have food others do not. Those who do not have cars, suits, or food can work towards acquiring those things/commodities. But power is not a commodity. It is an attribute or quality which all humans possess. It is an attribute which can be used to make us happy or unhappy. It is an attribute which can be used to dominate others or act in cooperation with others (sharing of resources).

Once we understand and accept that